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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

July 29, 2010

OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR GENERAL

Concur: Case Closed *[Signature]*
MEMORANDUM TO: Joseph A. McMillan
Assistant Inspector General
for Investigations

THRU:

FROM:

(b)(7)(C)

SUBJECT: NRC OVERSIGHT OF REACTOR COOLANT PUMP SEALS AT
OCONEE NUCLEAR STATION (OIG CASE NO. 08-41)

Allegation

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG), U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), initiated this investigation based on an allegation by (b)(7)(C) (b)(7)(C) NRC, that a Region III senior manager prevented him from processing an inadequate seal modification issue regarding the replacement of the reactor coolant pump (RCP) seals at the Oconee Nuclear Station Unit 1 through the reactor oversight process (ROP). According to (b)(7)(C) who at the time was the (b)(7)(C) at Oconee, the ROP would have included a significance determination process (SDP) to estimate the risk significance of the seal issue.

Findings

OIG found that (b)(7)(C) issue, inadequate Oconee Unit 1 RCP seal modification, had been processed through the ROP and the SDP, Phases 1 through 3. Based on the Phase 3 analysis, the finding was determined to be of very low safety significance (green).

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Basis for Findings

Reactor Oversight Process

The NRC's regulatory framework for reactor oversight is a risk-informed approach to ensure plant safety. Within this framework, the ROP provides a means of collecting information (e.g., findings) about licensee performance, assessing the information for its safety significance, taking appropriate NRC action, and ensuring that licensees take appropriate corrective action. Because there are many aspects of plant operation, the NRC inspects licensee programs and processes to obtain representative information.

The ROP utilizes the risk-informed SDP to help inspectors determine the safety significance of inspection findings. An inspector or senior reactor analyst uses the SDP tools (i.e., Phases 1 through 3) to estimate the risk significance of an inspection finding. The final outcome of the risk significance evaluation determines its color – green, white, yellow, or red – green indicating the least significant and red indicating the most significant. The final outcome is used to determine what further NRC action may be appropriate.

OIG Interviews

(b)(7)(C) told OIG that he wanted to process the RCP seal issue through the ROP; however, Leonard Wert, Manager, Region III did not allow him to process the issue through the ROP, which would have included a SDP, Phase 3. (b)(7)(C) stated that the seal issue was never processed through the ROP, and an SDP was not performed.

Wert told OIG he recalled discussing the RCP seal issue with (b)(7)(C) however, their discussion did not include any prohibition on pursuing the RCP seal issue through the ROP.

OIG interviewed (b)(7)(C) when (b)(7)(C) was the Oconee SRI. (b)(7)(C) stated in 2004 he assisted (b)(7)(C) on the RCP seal issue. (b)(7)(C) recalled that the seal issue went through the SDP, Phase 3.

(b)(7)(C) Region II, told OIG that (b)(7)(C) seal issue was processed through the ROP. (b)(7)(C) conducted the SDP, Phase 3, and it was determined that the issue was not a violation of regulatory requirements.

NRC Inspection Reports

OIG reviewed NRC's Oconee Integrated Inspection Report 2004003, dated July 23, 2004, which specifically addressed the Unit 1 RCP seal modification in which the inspectors identified a finding regarding the inadequate modification of the Unit 1 RCP seals. An SDP was initiated, but the inspectors determined that further inspection was required to complete the SDP.

OIG also reviewed NRC's Oconee Integrated Inspection Report 2005003, dated

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July 28, 2005, which indicated that Phases 2 and 3 of the SDP were performed. Based on the SDP results, the inadequate Unit 1 RCP seal modification finding was determined to be of very low safety significance (green). The seal issue was closed in Oconee Integrated Inspection Report 2005003.

Because (b)(7)(C) issue concerning inadequate seal modification was processed through the ROP SDP, it is recommended that this investigation be closed to file.

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